



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
DISABILITY ACCESS OFFICE

**SAOEM**

## **SAN ANTONIO OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND DISABILITY ACCESS OFFICE**

**Developing an Emergency Plan for  
People with Disabilities**

**September/October 2018**

**Multiple locations**

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- **Where have we been?**
- **What did we learn?**
- **What are we currently doing?**
- **Where are we going?**
- **Timeline**
- **Group activity**
- **Q & A**

Hello and welcome to the second round of community meetings focused on developing an emergency plan for people with disabilities. My name is Deborah Scharven and I am the Accessibility Compliance Manager for the City of San Antonio. My co-presenter is James Mendoza, Assistant Emergency Manager with the San Antonio Office of Emergency Management. Today we are talk about what we learned from the community conversations this past spring and how that information is directing our path forward. We will also talk about some of the steps we are currently taking to improve access. And lastly, we will have group discussions on possible solutions to some of the challenges we heard about in the first round.



- 15 community meetings
- 173 attendees
- Online and print survey
- 23 responses

Just as a reminder of what we did. Our offices conducted 15 community meetings throughout the City over six weeks in February and March 2018. We had a total of 173 attendees at the 15 meetings where we provided Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. We also conducted a community survey online and in print which was made available in English, Spanish and ASL. And we received 23 responses.



- **Transportation**
- **Effective Communication**
- **Education & Preparedness**
- **Disability Awareness Training**
- **Access to Resources**



So we did we learn? A lot. From these conversations, we were able to group issues and concerns into five main categories:

1. **Transportation.** Transportation came up in meeting as a worry and a barrier for people with disabilities.
2. **Effective Communication.** We were told by many in the disability community that our information and alerts are not accessible to those who are Deaf/HoH; blind or visually impaired; or those with intellectual disabilities.
3. **Education and Preparedness.** This category refers to what the individual or family can do to prepare themselves for an emergency situation. Many attendees did not know what topics were important, how to prepare, or where to get the information.
4. **Disability Awareness Training.** We heard many stories about the lack of sensitivity and awareness by first responders (police, fire, EMT) and by volunteers working shelters. The community says more training for staff and volunteers is needed.
5. **Access to Resources.** Many community members did not know where to start if an emergency hit them and they needed to access various community resources.

So let's talk more in depth about each concern.



- Lack of transportation
- Medical equipment
- Evacuation routes
- Families
- Service animals and/or pets



Transportation became an important conversation topic at each meeting. We heard about various scenarios that exist for many which affect access to transportation in the event of an emergency.

I live with my family/roommate/friend and they are my transportation. How do I evacuate if they are not home?

I have a disability and am a mom/dad. How do I load up everything my family needs for an evacuation if I physically cannot do this?

I have a child/elderly parent who has a lot of medical equipment. And I have children/pets. I can't get everyone out safely in time by myself.

I live alone and have a disability. What happens if the route in/out of my neighborhood is blocked. What do I do?

Will the City help me evacuate? Will you evacuate my wheelchair/medical equipment? My service animal/pet?

What if I don't want to leave my home and choose to stay? What happens?

Who does the City work with to provide transportation? Is it enough during a large emergency like Harvey?

The conversation shows us we need to work with citizens on developing multiple individual/family emergency plans and look at ways the City can be pro-active in developing additional partnerships with transportation organizations.





- AlertSA
- Plain language
- Media
- COSA website
- Technology
- Alternate formats
- ASL interpreters



Effective communication became an important conversation topic at each meeting. We heard about various scenarios that exist for many which affect access to information in the event of an emergency.

AlertSA is not accessible to people who are deaf (no ASL) or blind (not compatible with assistive technology).

AlertSA does not allow a user to provide full details on what help they may need.

The media does not always include ASL interpreters in broadcasts.

Scrolling captioning is too small to read on broadcasts.

Emergency alerts are not accessible to people who are deaf/HoH or blind/visually impaired.

Alerts and information use words I do not understand.

The City's website is not accessible and emergency information is hard to find.

The City is moving towards digital information and alerts-cell phone/computers.

What about those who do not have access to computers? Smart phones?

Emergency information is only in English. What about Spanish? Braille? ASL?

The conversation shows us how much the City needs to review communication strategies.



- What do I need to know?
- Personal vs. City responsibility
- Access to information

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A third critical issue we found centered around education and preparedness for individuals and their family members.

I don't know what I need to do or know to protect myself/family if a flood/fire/emergency happens.

What is the role of the City in an emergency? What will they do to help me?

How do I get the information? Where do I go? Are there classes? Is it just online?

The conversation shows the City needs to look at outreach strategies to target the disability community.



Throughout the meetings, staff heard several stories and concerns about how first responders interact with people with disabilities during an emergency.

I am blind and will not open my door to a person saying they are a police/fire/EMT. I want to verify who they are by calling to verify a badge number. What happens in an emergency when there may not be time to do this? What is the procedure? What is the procedure when going door to door to evacuate? What happens if someone cannot hear the door knock? Shelter volunteers do not know how to work with people with disabilities or what they need to provide when I ask for it.

This conversation shows the City needs to take a look at training across the board for emergency personnel and volunteers.





- Connection to recovery resources
- Disability community engagement
- Collaborations
- Marketing
- Sharing of information



Source: [Chandra et al, 2011, RAND](#)

The last critical issue is access to resources for both the individual citizen and for the emergency management staff.

If my home was damaged, I do not know who could help or even where to start.  
Do the organizations called in to help, know how to work with a person with a disability?

Application forms and processes are complicated and many staff from the non-profits aren't skilled in helping elderly/disability communities.

I tell all this information to my (doctor/social worker/etc.). Why can you just share this information instead of making me do another registration?

Who does the City partner with? Do you partner with schools, hospitals, home health, etc.? Why or why not?

Do you share your information with \_\_\_\_\_ (schools, hospitals, disability groups, etc.)?

How do you share the information? (similar concerns to effective communication)

How do you get input from people with disabilities?

Most people in the disability community don't participate in city business like this.

What are you doing to get more involved?

This conversation shows the City needs to look at partnerships and ways to better connect to the disability community.



## Assessing where we can make immediate changes

- Accessible AlertSA
- Inclusive PSAs
- Staff development
- Networking with other cities
- ASL interpreter contracts



These community conversations took place in February and March. So what have we done since then? Both of our offices have looked at ways we can make immediate changes that can improve some of the issues we heard about.

We now have Accessible AlertSA. The City of San Antonio contracted with an agency called DeafLink to provide accessible emergency alerts. Currently, the City and DeafLink are creating the system and taking pre-registration with the goal of mid-November to have the system available to the public.

The Office of Emergency Management (SAOEM) developed inclusive PSAs that will be released to the public over the next few months. Not only are the PSAs captioned and have ASL included, the PSAs include citizens with disabilities represented in the videos.

Staff in both offices have worked hard to increase our knowledge about inclusive emergency planning. SAOEM sent staff to the Getting It Right 2018-National Inclusive Disaster Strategies Conference. Staff have attended multiple webinars and trainings and we are talking to cities around the country getting information on what they do that works and isn't working well.

The City has also contracted with local agencies to provide on-site interpreters for emergency news conferences and other emergency management events.



## Who? Whole Community Participants



So what does all this mean? Where are we going with all of this information? To be honest, our focus has changed from January to now. In January, we thought (at least I did), we would create a separate annex or plan specifically targeting the disability community. But that is not best practice. After all we heard and learned over the last 6 months, we are moving to a whole community strategy and ensuring people with disabilities and their issues are addressed through emergency management plans and practices



**Phase 1 – Community Engagement**

**February through June**

**Phase 2 – Staff Development**

**June through August**

**Phase 3 – Community Engagement**

**September through October**

**Phase 4 – Draft Report Released for Community Review**

**Late November**

**Phase 5 – Final Report Released**

**December 21, 2018**

**\*Report will include: critical issues and strategic plan for addressing these issues**

Because of these changes, we are adjusting our timeline. We are currently in Phase 3. The second round of community engagement meetings. Our current timeline is to release a draft report for community review in late November with a final report released right before the holidays. This report will discuss the critical issues and a strategic plan to address these issues.



**GOAL: Tell us how we can do things differently**

**20 minute time limit**

**10 minutes for discussion**

**10 minutes for sharing**

**Choose someone to take notes. These notes will be picked up at the end of each round.**

**Groups will pick a speaker to share thoughts with larger group**

In the first round of meetings, we heard a lot of concerns and barriers but there was not a lot of discussion about solutions. We have created some questions for the groups to discuss.

(Read instructions)





**What are some strategies to improve access to transportation during emergencies and during recovery?**

**What can the City do? What can the individual or family do?**

Read questions and discuss



**What are some strategies to help improve preparedness for individuals and families with people with disabilities?**

**What preparedness topics should be prioritized for people with disabilities?**

**What are the best ways to get preparedness information to the community?**

Read questions and discuss



**What are some strategies to share information regarding resources for people with disabilities? Before, during and after the event**

**What resources should be prioritized for people with disabilities?**

**What are the best ways to get resource information to the community?**

Read questions and discuss



**What are some strategies to improve how and when people with disabilities connect with the Office of Emergency Management?**

**What are some strategies to improve how people with disabilities get involved with City business, specifically emergency planning for people with disabilities?**

Read questions and discuss



Our offices would like to thank you for attending and sharing your thoughts. At this time does any one have any questions or thoughts you would like to add?





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